Communication Products Push Multivendor Links

By Matt Kramer

LAS VEGAS, NV—From large-scale local area networks (LANs) to simple interfaces between the Macintosh and the IBM PC, communications products at the National Computer Conference (NCC) focused on one central theme: interconnection between vendors.

The large factory-automation and office local area network demonstrations set most of the show's tone. General Motors tied together IBM, Digital Equipment Corp. (DEC) and Hewlett-Packard systems over a broadband local area network.

Bridge Communications also moved its Ethernet product line slightly into the factory environment with two diskless communications and file servers. The diskless units connect users over Ethernet coaxial cable where disks might be contaminated or users cannot physically access the system node.

Bridge officials also said the new servers made loading software easier by sending software to all servers from the a central Network Control Server. The new units, CS/1-X (which can handle as many as 32 asynchronous or bisynchrnous ports and is priced a $9,600) and CS/100-X (available in four-, 10- and 14-port configurations at prices ranging from $3,600 to $5,100) will be shipped in 60 days. Bridge Communications is located at 1345 Shorebird Way, Mountain View, CA 94043 (415) 969-4400.

Easing File Transfer

NCC exhibitors also unveiled products that interconnect PCs and simplify file transfer. Several LAN vendors demonstrated gateways to 3270 SNA mainframes. (See related story.)

Charles River Data Systems debuted Universe Net, an 802.3 baseband Ethernet-type system. Universe Net also offers file transfer, electronic mail and remote printer spooling. Pricing was not available at press time.

Charles River Data Systems Inc. is located at 983 Concord St., Framingham, MA 01701 (617) 626-1000.

Sperry Corp. demonstrated USERNET for its IBM PC-compatible PC, even though the product won't be delivered until September. USERNET connects PCs to a data or print server via twisted-pair wiring in a baseband bus topology.

Sperry officials said the details of the architecture have not been completed.

The company plans two versions of its data/print server, each to support at least 12 stations and three printers.

Individual file transfer and communications needs were also addressed. Transend Corp. introduced a terminal communications and electronic-mail package for the IBM PC for use with the Transend PC modem card.

Dubbed PC COMPLETE!, the package features icons and symbols to indicate incoming and outgoing mail. (An IN and OUT basket are pictured on the screen.) Users can send messages unattended at preprogrammed hours. The package can also store 128 phone numbers.

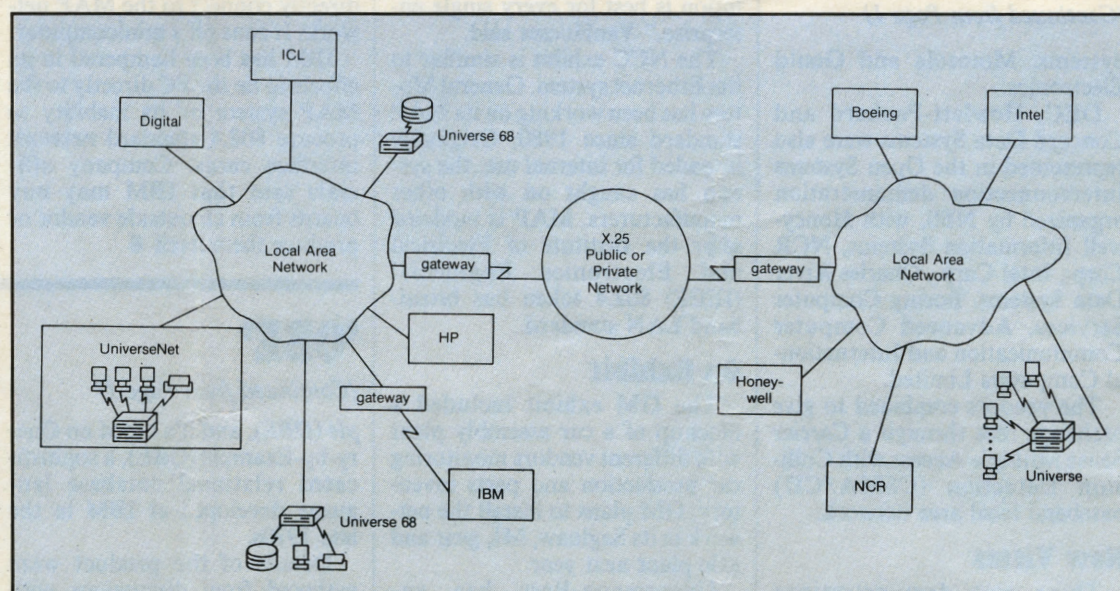PC COMPLETE! supports the X-Modem and XON/XOFF protocols.

Transend is located at 2190 Paragon Drive, San Jose, CA 95131 (408) 946-7400.

Latest on Links

Two vendors unveiled communications hardware and software packages to link the Macintosh to other systems.

Dilithium Press, a book and software publisher based in Oregon, introduced PC to MAC and BACK, a file-transfer utility between the Macintosh and the IBM PC. The package will transfer files between the two systems through an RS-232 serial connection null modem or over telephone lines.

Priced less than $100, the package includes software for the Macintosh and the PC. PC to MAC and BACK supports X-Modem protocol along with three other error-detection protocols. Dilithium Press is located at 8285 S.W. Nimbus, Suite 151, Beaverton, OR 97005 (503) 646-2713.

While Dilithium offers a direct connection between Macintosh and the PC, Sunol Systems introduced an interface to link the Macintosh into its SunNet local area network through twisted-pair cabling to a SunDisk unit.

Sunol claims the Macintosh and IBM PC can exchange messages over the local area network.

Sunol Systems can be contacted at P.O. Box 1777, 1187 Quarry Lane, Pleasanton, CA 94566 (415) 484-3322. ∎

UniverseNet Networking Environments

Nestar Introduces IBM SNA Gateway, Software

By Matt Kramer

LAS VEGAS, NV—Responding to increased interest in gateways between local area networks and mainframes, Nestar Systems last week introduced an IBM SNA (systems network architecture) gateway to its PLAN product line. The gateway was one of several Nestar products announced at the National Computer Conference here.

The company also introduced a new group of bundled applications packages customized for the PLAN series and new wiring options on a new concentrator box.

Nestar now supports fiber-optic cable and IBM's newly announced twisted-pair cabling scheme. The concentrator box allows Nestar to lengthen the distances between terminals.

Nestar is the latest in a series of LAN vendors who have announced mainframe links. Fox Research also demonstrated its SNA gateway for the Fox 10-Net LAN here, and Corvus included its SNA gateway in its exhibit.

Nestar's approach is similar to that of the BlueLynx SNA gateway product produced for Fox Research by Techland Systems.

How the Gateway Works

Using an IBM SDLC 3270 (Techland uses its own 3270 board) emulation board and Nestar emulation software, a gateway PC emulates a remote 3274 cluster controller, Nestar President Charles Hart said.

Hooked up to a modem, the gateway PC allows other stations on the LAN to run emulation software and function as interactive terminals. As many as 16 PCs, acting as 3278 and 3279 terminals, can use the gateway.

The gateway PC software is priced at $3,000, with individual terminal-emulation packages sold for $200. The new bundled application package, known as PLANpak, includes Sorcim's SuperWriter and SuperCalc, LAN·DATASTORE database, ActionMail electronic mail and Quest Inc.'s Quest Accountant.

All the packages have been customized for Nestar and are menu driven. PLANpak will be bundled free with Nestar file servers for the next two months. Nestar has not determined a final price, but Hart claimed users will save $3,000 over retail prices by purchasing the bundle.

Nestar's new wiring methods for its LANs center around the new concentrator box. The box, available in six and 16 port ($595 and $1,095) configurations, accepts either traditional coaxial cable, the new IBM twisted-pair wiring or fiber-optic cable.

Hart said the unit would cut down on-line noise and extend the maximum distance between network nodes from the current 2,000-foot limit to 4,000 feet.

Nestar Systems is located at 2585 E. Bayshore, Palo Alto, CA 94303 (415) 493-2223. ∎

PHOTO BY LEE McDONALD

Nestar's SNA gateway debuted at NCC.

Multi-PC Joins Workstations to PC

CONGERS, NY—Anex Technology has developed an eight-slot expansion chassis that a company spokesman said will allow three workstations to share an IBM PC or PC XT.

Called the Multi-PC, it plugs into any vacant slot in the PC and allows each workstation to operate independently, an Anex representative said.

All stations work under the host system's PC-DOS, enabling each workstation to use PC-DOS programs (including graphics) and files, the company spokesman said. The printer and the hard disk can also be shared, he added.

Share and Share Alike

The expansion unit, which also provides password security, allows users to run the same program or different programs concurrently; share all programs, databases and system peripheral devices, and run bit-mapped graphics, according to the spokesman.

Multi-PC can be installed in the field and is available for $1,495.

Anex Technology is located at 151 N. Route 9W, Congers, NY 10920 (914) 268-2400. ∎